

**STATEMENT OF**  
**THE JAMES L. OBERSTAR**  
**RANKING DEMOCRATIC MEMBER**

**BEFORE THE**  
**COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION**  
**MARCH 1, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hoyer, and Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure to be here this afternoon with Committee Chairman Don Young to speak to you briefly in support of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's budget proposal for the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Over the past 37 years, I have been associated with the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in a number of different capacities. I have served as Administrative Assistant to former Chairman John Blatnik, on staff as the Committee Administrator, and as a Committee Member, Subcommittee Chair and Ranking Democrat.

I was, in fact, the Committee Administrator to my predecessor John Blatnik when Don Young, our new Chairman, was elected to Congress following the tragic loss of an incumbent Member of Congress in Alaska, Nick Begich. I remember John Blatnik saying, "Whatever we can do to help Don in Alaska, we want to do." Just a

very few years later, I was elected to Congress and we were working together on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. Time and again, I saw Don Young speak with knowledge, passion, persuasiveness, and effectiveness for the State of Alaska. He educated Members on merit and value and what was right and fair and just, and that has been a hallmark of his service in the Congress.

Don and I have already established an excellent working relationship on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. In one of our first discussions after he became Chairman, Don agreed to my request and increased the size of several of our subcommittees to better enable Democratic members to get those assignments they wished to have. Right and fair and just! Responding to a second request, he declared that we would have only one shared administrative staff position, rather than the two we shared last Congress. Again, our Chairman opted for right and fair and just! In terms of reaching the goal of 1/3 of the slots, 1/3 of the total budget and definite control of all those resources, we are moving in the right direction. We are almost there.

As I stressed in the Committee's organizational meeting, if we work together from the start - - to put it very simply - - if we are there on the takeoff, we will be there on the landing. That means drafting legislation together from the start, understanding one another, sharing values, sharing resources, and working out

differences with the greater good of the country in mind. But I say again, doing what is right and fair and just has been a hallmark of Don's service in the Congress. I respect and appreciate these virtues in him and know that spirit will prevail in our work together on the Committee.

Chairman Young has outlined the enormous scope and seriousness of the issues that face our Committee. Chairman Ney, as a senior member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee - - indeed, a number of the Members of House Administration Committee are on our Committee - - you know these issues well:

- We're facing significant proposals to consolidate in the airline industry. The idea of three "mega carriers", which sounds terrific to some within the industry, but would be terrible for consumers.
- In the last year, airline delays have increased by more than 20 percent. Our air travel system is getting bogged down at a time when domestic and international passenger enplanements are expected to increase from approximately 660 million in 1999 to almost 1 billion by 2009. Commercial airports handled more than 8.5 million flights, nearly double the number of flights handled in the mid-1970's.

- Our Air Traffic Control (ATC) equipment and procedures are major contributing factors in airline delays. Today's ATC procedures are all built on top of the original non-radar procedures from a time when the controllers tracked aircraft on paper and calculated their position through a difficult mental process (this remains the current back-up plan). When automation tools were added in the 1970's, the underlying procedures remained relatively unchanged.
- We may be looking at the prospect of railroads merging into two carriers. Two railroads covering all of North America!
- Today, highway vehicle miles traveled exceed 2.6 trillion per year and continue to grow. Transit ridership reached 9 billion in 1999, the highest in 40 years.
- Increased demand for transportation brings increased safety, energy, environmental, and congestion concerns.
- The U. S. Coast Guard is currently reducing its vessel and aircraft operations by 10 to 30 percent due to insufficient operating funds to pay for the higher cost of fuel and costs imposed by the National Defense Authorization Act. These reductions risk the lives and property of Americans who sail on our lakes, waterways, and seacoasts. Oversight is crucial.

- Global Warming has arrived! We must find where our nation is a part of the problem and ask what we can do from a transportation and environmental perspective to bring about change and help avoid disaster.

These are all issues that undoubtedly will be a cause for policy and political concerns for all of us and increasingly important in the work of our Committee. And while these are only highlights, they illustrate how enormous the consumer, economic, and standard-of-living policy implications will be. Chairman Young is exactly right: we should have more field hearings, more effective and active oversight, and we need to maintain a highly trained and experienced staff. The fact is, these things cost more. But when you're about to land in a blinding snowstorm, driving at 75 miles an hour next to a trucker who has been on the road for 18 hours, or see that your district has the infrastructure to support new industry, how much staff experience are you comfortable doing without? Do we really want decisions of safety and congestion solutions to be based on analysis by a young, inexperienced staff?

I strongly support the Committee's budget proposal for increased funding and share Don's commitment, and that of the other Members of our Committee, to have staff and dollars to do the job. The task before you is as important as it is difficult. A committee system that is adequately prepared and fully productive depends on you. Thank you for your time.